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*The  
Scandal  
of the  
Cross*

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## Editorial



In his informative little book, *Crucifixion*, Martin Hengel states that it is the crucifixion that distinguishes the Christian message from the mythologies of all other people. He writes:

With its paradoxical contrast between the divine nature of the pre-existent Son of God and his shameful death on the cross, the first Christian proclamation *shattered all analogies and parallels* to Christology which could be produced in the world of time, whether from polytheism or from monotheistic philosophy. (p. 15)

In other words, the cross-centered message of Christianity is absolutely unique in the history of religions. Who would ever dream of starting a religion with an ugly cross at its center? Yet, this is precisely what Jesus and the apostles did. True, his first disciples were slow to accept the idea of a crucified Messiah, yet as the literature of the NT reveals, they came to see in Christ's death on the cross a profound and inexhaustible mystery. Eventually, they understood the cross not just to be an instrument of scorn and shame, but also an instrument of glory. Paradoxically, according to their faith, God redeemed the world in the death of Jesus. God first absorbs evil then defeats it. The despicable act of man becomes in the hands of God a glorious act of redemption.

The early Christian evangelists employed a variety of analogies to communicate the mystery of the cross. Paul seems to pull metaphors from every area of life. He draws the words expiation, sanctification and sacrifice from the world of temple worship; liberation from the historical event of the Exodus; ransom- redemption from business; salvation from medicine; righteousness-justification from the law courts; reconciliation from personal relationships; adoption, rebirth, sonship and new creation from life itself. All of these are word pictures. They are not to be interpreted literally. For example, when he uses the sacrifice metaphor, Paul is saying that an act of sacrifice is *somewhat like* what Jesus accomplished when he died on the cross. No one analogy nor any combination of them can fully convey the mystery of the cross.

It is disappointing to note that much of popular preaching of today is devoid of the word of the cross. I have just perused a list of sermons used by one church to win souls to Christ. I noted two on the Antichrist, three on the mark of the beast, two on the unpardonable sin, etc., but there was only one that employed one of the metaphors (salvation) of the cross. What's big in the Bible gets missed for many evangelists are under great pressure to add members to their denomination rather than to win them to Christ.

It is disturbing to note that Christianity's unique teaching is ignored in so many popular pulpits of today.

Over the last few years I have met many Christians who were struggling to maintain faith in the midst of life's trials. They had accepted without question the popular "health and wealth" gospel and thought that the blessings of health and material prosperity were bestowed automatically upon every Christian who claimed these "promises." "Why," said one weeping widow to me recently, "why was my husband, who walked so closely with the Lord every day, violently killed, when our next-door neighbor who doesn't even profess Christianity continues to prosper and be in good health?"

The cross is the Christian's answer to such a perplexing question. The cross is what life is like in the common experience of humanity. Dishonesty and corruption flourish, the innocent suffer, good appears to be always on the scaffold and death seems to be the final word. But the cross invites us to wait and see the way God absorbs evil, turns it inside out into a blessing. It tells us that God is at the heart of all pain and suffering, working for the redemption of the human race. In the darkest moments of defeat and depression, if we will but listen, we will hear God say, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

—Noel Mason



# THE SCANDAL OF THE C R O S S

**B**ut we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. . . . For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2). What was happening at Corinth to motivate Paul to write these words? What situation stimulated Paul to such a forceful expression of his theology of the cross?

## The Problems at Corinth

One reading of 1 Corinthians is sufficient to convince any reader that

*by Noel Mason*

the Corinthian church had a number of serious problems. The unity of the church seems to have been torn apart by schismatics, ascetics and ecstasies. How quickly the sins pile up! There were schisms (1:10-3:23), immorality (5:1-13), lawsuits (6:1-11), marriage problems (7:1-40), conflicts over meat offered to idols (8:1-11:1), "pigging out" at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), disorderly conduct in worship by the ecstasies (12:1-14:40) and grave doctrinal problems, such as denying the resurrection of the dead (15:1-58). As Ernst Kasemann has said, "The

most remarkable thing is that Paul does not make a clean sweep of it and at least excommunicate those who deny the resurrection."<sup>1</sup>

Why was the Corinthian church so besieged with problems? What was the root cause of the ruckus?

Some scholars believe that the problems at Corinth were created by a group of enthusiastic Christians who misunderstood some of Paul's teachings about the resurrection of Christ and how it relates to baptism and the Christian life.<sup>2</sup> It seems the Corinthians may have originated a heresy that was rooted in their exuberant resurrection theology.



Perhaps the heretics, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who are mentioned in Paul's correspondence to Timothy had similar ideas:

Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that *the resurrection is past already*.

(2 Tim 2:16-18)

It is clear from I Corinthians 15:12,25 that some of the Corinthians, too, were denying the necessity for a resurrection of the dead, i.e., a resurrection of the body. "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of *body* do they come?" These are their cynical questions.

It seems that the Corinthians had a dualistic conception of a person—a body plus spirit or soul—and that they placed little value on the body. They probably believed that Christ's resurrection took place when his spirit was released from his body at death. It is believed that the ecstatic cry, "Jesus be cursed" (1 Cor 12:3) is a reference to the earthly Jesus. What mattered most to the Corinthians was the Christ of the heavens. Likewise, they may have believed that their resurrection took place at baptism when they received the Spirit. Death for them would bring a welcome release from the tomb of the body.

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***The "word of the cross" is an expression of absolute grace which deprives man of the opportunity to boast in worldly wisdom, works of the law, or in a Spirit-filled life with all its gifts.***

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The enthusiasts at Corinth were totally absorbed with their idea of the Spirit-filled life. Blessed with a rich endowment of spiritual gifts they were living it up in the realms of ecstasy (1 Cor 12-14). What was done in the earthly, physical body mattered little to these excited

Christians (1 Cor 6:13). With more than a touch of sarcasm, Paul states:

Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And



would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! (1 Cor 4:8)

"You are not *that* saved," says Paul, in a rhetorical way.

#### **Paul's Solution**

How does Paul address the problems in the church at Corinth? What does he say to these arrogant, superelite Christians who were already living it up in glory?

His response is clear, decisive and immediate. "Was Paul *crucified* for you?" is his challenging question to the schismatics in the opening chapter (1:13). Immediately he challenges their theology of glory (glorying in the Spirit-filled life) with a theology of the cross. He reminds the arrogant intellectuals of Corinth that "*the word of the cross* is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18). Here is Paul's theological tack in correcting those who were parading their gifts and claiming more than just a down payment of the Spirit. "For Jews demand signs," says Paul, "and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach *Christ crucified*, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). Commentators have pointed out that the participle "*crucified*" in this text is in the perfect tense, denoting a continuing reality

which began with the historical crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> According to E. Ellis, "Christ crucified" refers "primarily to the exalted Lord who, in his exaltation, remains the crucified one."<sup>4</sup> "Christ crucified," says Paul, "this is where I stand!"

It is interesting to note how Paul applies his theology of the cross to the problems at Corinth. He reminds the arrogant intellectuals that the foolishness of God (the cross) is wiser than men (1:26). "You were bought with a price" is his reminder to those who were guilty of immorality (6:20; 7:23). "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" is his challenge to those who were engaged in lawsuits which scandalized the Christian community. He reminds those who were flaunting their freedoms of the fact that Christ *died* for the weaker brother (1 Cor 8:11).

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***From the very beginning a crucified Messiah offended Jews, particularly those who cherished proud, nationalistic hopes. A crucified redeemer was utterly repellent to the Gentile mind.***

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"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord, in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" is his warning to those who were acting selfishly at the Lord's Supper (11:27). To those who were egotistically parading their spiritual gifts, he speaks of a more excellent way, the way of self-sacrificing love:

Love is patient, kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

It is no wonder that G. G. Findlay stated, that the central theme of Corinthians was "the doctrine of the cross in its social application."<sup>5</sup>



## The Scandal of the Cross

Why was "the word of the cross" a scandal to Jews and folly to the Gentiles? Wherein lies its offensiveness? The answer is found in 1 Cor 1:27-29:

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, *so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*



The "word of the cross" is an expression of absolute grace which deprives man of the opportunity to boast in worldly wisdom, works of the law, or in a Spirit-filled life with all its gifts. The revelation of God's righteousness in the cross and the resurrection had convinced Paul that all attempts at seeking a righteousness based on law were nothing but a manifestation of the proud, carnal heart of sinful man. Again at the end of his explanation of Christ's death in Romans 3:21-26, Paul asks: "Then what becomes of our *boasting*? It is *cluded*" (3:27). In his letter to the Galatians Paul says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, *lest any man should boast.* (2:9)

It's not very flattering to our human nature, but God had to devise a way of salvation that gave no opportunity for human pride and conceit, to stop us from boasting. Here lies the offense of the cross. It is God's NO to all our egotistical attempts at self-justification.

From the very beginning, a crucified Messiah offended Jews, particularly those who cherished proud, nationalistic hopes (Mk 8:27-38). A crucified redeemer was utterly repellent to the Gentile mind. In the first century,

only slaves, violent criminals and unruly elements in rebellious provinces (e.g., Judea A.D. 69, etc.) were put to death by crucifixion. The only Romans that were crucified were those guilty of treason. No "respectable" criminal was ever nailed to a cross. This way of execution was reserved for the scum of the earth and to die naked on a cross was to die in shame without pity or honor. No wonder the gospel sounded foolish to the Gentiles.

Another offensive aspect of Paul's message of the cross was the assertion that Jesus as Son of God died for all men. In the Gentile mind the gods of Greece or Rome were by nature immortal. The idea of an incarnate Son of God dying on a cross for all men was to the Greek, Roman and barbarian a blatant contradiction. It was foolishness.

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***Jesus has now many lovers of his heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of his cross.... He finds many companions of his table, but few of his abstinence. ...All desire to rejoice with him, but few are willing to endure anything for his sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of his passion.***

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## The Cross Today

The Christian church today faces dangers similar to those that faced the church at Corinth. Rather than glorying in the cross (Gal 6:14) thousands today glory in the Spirit-filled life. The popular religion of today is one that is pleasant and comfortable, one that sits well with our perceived needs, one that guarantees success and prosperity. *It is a religion without a cross.*

Like Peter and the other disciples, many in the modern church have been led off the path of the cross—one that leads through suffering to glory.

Centuries ago, Thomas A. Kempis (1380-1471), a German mystic, wrote a series of little books called *The Imitation of Christ*. They are a manual of devotion to help the soul achieve communion with God. In Book 2 (ch. 11) he writes:

Jesus has now many lovers of his heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of his cross.... He finds many companions of his table, but few of his abstinence. ...All desire to rejoice with him, but few are willing to endure anything for his sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of his passion.

We often sing: "So I'll cherish the old rugged cross," but do we really know what we are singing?

No one can really understand the scandal of the cross without first of all seeing it as it really was back there in its own historical setting. Without this historical perspective, the cross is in danger of becoming a mere symbol of some timeless, mystical, abstract truth far removed from the jolting reality of the first century. In striking contrast to the pretty mahogany, the gold and silver crosses of today's religious art, the ancient cross was a crude, splintery instrument of torture and execution. In his book, *Crucifixion*, Martin Hengel quotes some lines from a poem that opens our eyes to the grisly reality of death by crucifixion:

Punished with limbs outstretched, they see the stake as their fate; they are fastened (and) nailed to it in the most bitter torment, evil food for birds of prey and grim pickings for dogs.<sup>6</sup>

This is the sort of image that would have immediately come to the minds of Jesus' disciples on that fateful day at Caesarea Philippi when he challenged them with these words:

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny

himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? (Mk 8:34-37)

If the social psychologist, David Myers, is correct, the words of Jesus are still relevant. His book *The Inflated Self* is a devastating revelation of the pride of modern people. "Self interest," he writes, "is the dominant motivation for most of us, although it is usually covered by a veneer of niceness."<sup>7</sup> There is no question that many people today suffer from a lack of self-esteem, but often what passes as a lack of self-esteem is a lack of low esteem (humility)!

***There is to be a daily dying and rising with Christ. There is no getting beyond the cross into a resurrection life that is free from the duty of bearing the cross.***

The cross as well as the resurrection must continue to inform Christian theology and practice. There

is to be a daily dying and rising with Christ. There is no getting beyond the cross into a resurrection life that is free from the duty of bearing the cross. The cross is to be part of our mental imagery as we journey through life in a self-centered, egotistical world.

Some may object on the assumption that a cross-centered religion is morbid and joyless. But this objection is offset by the fact that the cross stands with the resurrection at the center of the Christian faith. Michael Green, in his recent book, *The Empty Cross of Jesus*, expressed the point well when he wrote:

This holding together of the crucifixion and resurrection in the Christian good news made sense of the worldly and the other worldly in people's lives. In the midst of sorrow and agony, life was shot through with the resurrection. In the most exalted moments of ecstasy and joy, the marks of the cross could not be eradicated. Here in the empty cross was the symbol that made sense of the whole of life, its incarnation and transformation, its joys and sorrows, its materialism and values, its 'already' and its 'not yet'. It spoke—and speaks still—to the hunger of the human

heart as no symbol in the world has ever spoken. The empty cross takes us to the heart of human need and to the heart of God's provision.<sup>8</sup>

***Whatever our problems, whatever our trials and suffering, the cross reminds us that God is with us in the very midst of our tragedies.***

Whatever our problems, whatever our trials and suffering, the cross reminds us that God is with us in the very midst of our tragedies, assuring us that he is a fellow sufferer and that the path of the cross is the only way of salvation—through suffering to glory.

When I survey the wondrous Cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

1. E. Kasemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, p. 59
2. J. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, p. 30-36
3. R. Martin, *Mark, Evangelist and Theologian*, p. 159
4. E. Ellis, *Reconciliation And Hope*, p. 70
5. G. G. Findlay, *Expositor's Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 739
6. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, p. 9
7. D. Myers, *The Inflated Self*, p. 3
8. M. Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus*, p. 147

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## THE LADDER OF LIFE

John 1:51 to end of Chapter 2

**I**t was his first night away from home, and he'd left in disgrace. He'd been deceitful, you see, and his brother was really furious with him. So his father decided it would be best if Jacob left home and visited his grandfather for a while.

On that first night away, he slept out under the stars, and in looking for a pillow found a stone. He'd walked so far that day that he didn't

even feel the hardness under his head and soon drifted off to sleep.

What a dream he had! In the darkness of the night (for there was no electric light, not even an oil lamp around) he suddenly saw before him a gigantic ladder that stretched from earth way high into and beyond the starry sky. And moving up and down on it, were what seemed like thousands of

angels. Some were about to step on the earth from the ladder. Others were getting on the ladder from the ground. But far up near the top, the angels looked like tiny molten glow-worms, gleaming in the soft starlight. And there up at the top was God himself burnished and shining like glowing white metal. He spoke to Jacob and gave him the same promises he'd once given to Abraham and Isaac.

"This land will one day belong to you and your descendants, Jacob. I'm going to bring you back here again and I'll never leave you lonely."

Jacob thought his dream was real, but when he opened his eyes, the ladder was gone and so were the shiny angels. But he thought it couldn't have just been a dream. It was a vision of heavenly things given to him by God. How scared he was! "Why, this is a very holy place. It's the House of God and the gateway to heaven."

The next morning before he left, he made a pillar and placed the stone he'd slept on, on top of it (a pillow on a pillar!). Then he anointed it with oil and called it Bethel, which meant "the house of God." But the name of the place had been called Luz before that, and it meant "light."

Many centuries later, Jesus quoted from this story. When Nathanael was talking to Jesus in John 1, and marveled that Jesus had seen him under the fig tree, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (Jn 1:51).

What was Jesus saying? He was referring to that story of Jacob and saying, "I am the ladder between heaven and earth and I am the life that links God and man. I am the



One in whom God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have all been fulfilled. I am the house of God (his temple) and I am the light of the world. I am Bethel and Luz. It must have nearly blown Nathanael's mind to hear Jesus saying he was Jacob's ladder.

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***Jesus wasn't a party pooper. He liked people and wanted them to have a good time.***

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So Jesus said he was the link between man and God and then to show the difference Jesus makes to our lives, John told the story of the miracle at Cana. Jesus was at a wedding and it was party time. Often those weddings lasted a week and there was always lots of wine. It wasn't strongly fermented like most of the wine people drink today, but it made the people cheerful nonetheless.

Jesus wasn't a party pooper. He liked people and wanted them to have a good time. But, oh dear, right in the middle of all the festivities, the wine ran out. Maybe it was night and the shops were shut. It must have been something like that because there was a bit of a panic. How embarrassing it was for the host and hostess. "Oh dear," they lamented, "what are we to do?"

Something stirred in Mary's heart. She knew her son was someone special, sent of God. Surely Jesus could do something about it. Jesus was a bit perplexed. "Mother!" he said, "what are you up to? It's not my time yet."

Mary just smiled at the servants and patted Jesus on the shoulder. "Now just you do what my son tells you."

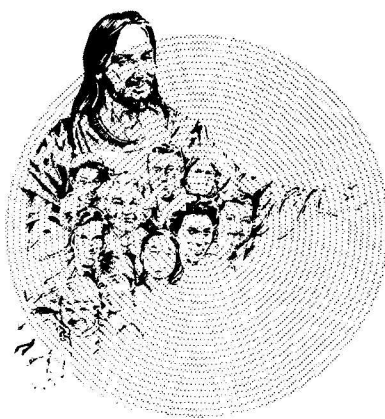
Jesus turned and saw six huge stone jars, each capable of holding twenty to thirty gallons of liquid. "Fill them with water," he ordered, and the servants filled them to the brim.

Then he told them to draw some liquid out and take it to the man in charge of running the feast. When the man tasted it, his face lightened

up and he smiled a big grin. "Why, this is the most delicious wine I've ever tasted." It was so good in fact that he went to the bridegroom and slapped him on the back. "Great stuff, this wine," he complimented him. "Fancy keeping the good stuff till last. Usually it's the other way round. You start off with the best and when they can't taste anything any more, you give them the rubbishy stuff."

It was quite a miracle wasn't it, this turning of water into wine. But it wasn't hard for Jesus because he was the creator of all the earth. It helped the disciples to believe that he was God. But the story has a deeper meaning than that.

The miracle took place on the third day, and in the Bible the third day is a symbol of a new life. It was on the third day that vegetation was made (Gn 1) when the world was first created. And so here, as in other places in the Bible, the third day speaks to us of resurrection.



See at the feast those six stony old jars—they represented the sad condition of the Jewish religion of Jesus' day. It was like an empty, cold, stony vessel—dry, hollow, lifeless, made to be useful, made to be filled, but nothing in it. But when Jesus added his water of salvation, it filled that empty vessel with rich new wine. It brought it life on the third day.

You'll remember Moses performed a miracle turning water into blood and brought a curse on

Egypt. But when this new Moses, Jesus, performed his miracle he turned water into wine and brought a blessing on Israel, but of course they never saw it that way. They didn't know he was bringing them joy and life and blessing. If they'd really known, they would have jumped up and down with happiness.

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***. . . the empty stone vessels represent the hearts of each of us without Jesus—empty, cold and lonely. Jesus came to fill us up with new wine, a symbol of great joy and happiness.***

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But on another level, the empty stone vessels represent the hearts of each of us without Jesus—empty, cold and lonely. Jesus came to fill us up with new wine, a symbol of great joy and happiness. That's really what the story of the wedding at Cana was meant to teach—Jesus wants to give us all a life that's full of happiness and joy.

But it's a happiness and joy that comes from doing what's right. The next story John tells us shows how Jesus feels about evil.

Jesus went straight from Cana to Capernaum and then on to Jerusalem. He went to the temple and found the men there selling animals for sacrifice and the money changers, robbing and cheating the poor people. The men selling animals were charging too much for them. The money changers who exchanged ordinary money into temple shekels were charging too much interest.

So Jesus got really furious. He made a scourge of small cords, a little whip with lots of ends, and drove the dishonest men with their sheep and oxen out of the temple. Can't you just imagine him after them with that whip, and turning the money changers' tables over so that their money poured out in a heap?

"Get these things out of here and stop making my Father's house into a shop," he shouted. It's quite a surprise to see Jesus change from a

party mood to a "serious business" mood. Yes, he was very angry. It wasn't that sort of anger that we mainly have—selfish temper tantrums because something hurts our feelings. No, his anger was different. It was for the sake of his Father that he cleaned out the greedy people in the temple. He hated the dishonesty of those men who were using religion to make money. It was a good sort of anger. You're allowed to get angry like that.

The Jews watching him asked him, "What right do you have to do these things?"

He gave them a funny answer. "Destroy this temple and I'll rebuild it in three days."

They thought he was talking about the temple building and laughed.

"Why, it took forty-six years to put this up. How will you do it in three

days?" They laughed a lot—it was quite a joke!

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***We will discover that Jesus, the ladder between heaven and earth, blesses mankind by transforming hearts today, as he once transformed water to wine long ago.***

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But, you see, Jesus was talking about his own body as a temple of God. Soon he would be put to death and would be raised three days later. After his death, the disciples remembered this story and wrote it down for us to read. Jesus was saying that the temple building was only a symbol—he was the real temple of God. That's

what gave him the right to clean it up.

John finished the second chapter of his book by telling us that while Jesus was in Jerusalem, he did many miracles and lots of people believed in him. But Jesus didn't trust himself to any of them because he knew what was in the heart of all men. All men, he knew, were evil inside. In the next chapter we'll meet a man whom Jesus is going to tell about this evil inside of him. He's going to tell him he needs to be born again.

Like Nicodemus (the name of this man in John 3), we all need to be born again, so our next story will be good news to you all. We will discover that Jesus, the ladder between heaven and earth, blesses mankind by transforming hearts today, as he once transformed water to wine long ago.

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# BIG JOHN

## LITTLE JOHN

—Desmond Ford

**H**ave you ever heard of the refugee boy with the name that was ever so long? Let me tell you about him. Remember, this is a true story, and the events happened just towards the close of the last great world war.

If you had lived in a small country town in America near the end of World War II, you might have seen a tall man who always seemed to have with him a small boy, dressed just like he was. So, if the man whose name was Big John was in the garden, he would be dressed in a large pair of overalls, and he would have a large bucket, a large fork and a large spade—while the little boy, known as Little John, would have a little pair of overalls, a little bucket, a little fork and a little spade. And on

the day they went to church, Big John's long legs would be going around on the bicycle wheels, while beside him was Little John with his legs going much quicker on the smaller wheels of the smaller bicycle. They just seemed to do everything together and got on wonderfully well.

There came a day when Big John and Little John went to church and the minister asked the congregation, "Who would throw open their home to receive someone from across the sea who had to flee their country because of war?" So, of course, Big John stood up, and as you've guessed it, Little John stood up too.

They wondered what sort of a refugee they would get. Would it

be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, fat or thin, tall or short. At last the day came when they went down to the harbor and saw the great ship drawing in from overseas. The gangplank was thrown down and the people streamed off, and at last they saw a little boy wrestling with a steward who finally flung him off the gangplank. "I'm glad to get rid of you," said the steward, as he disentangled himself from the small boy. Big John and Little John noticed that on the chest of the small boy was a long name written on a piece of cardboard. It was a name that seemed nearly a foot long. So they took home their refugee.

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***What a surprise packet he was. He wasn't a good boy like Little John. What he was told not to do he did, and what he was told to do he didn't do. But he did love Little John.***

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What a surprise packet he was. He wasn't a good boy like Little John. What he was told *not* to do he did, and what he was told to do he didn't

do. But he did love Little John. They did lots of things together, though Little John was always good and the little refugee boy seemed almost always bad.

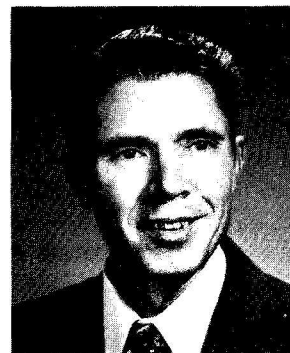
It came winter and Big John told the boys that they mustn't go skating on the lake nearby which would freeze over. And, of course, Little John said to himself that he wouldn't, and the little refugee boy said something different. That's why it was that one day they found him shivering with cold, blue in the face, holding on to the broken fragments of ice, while he himself was up to his neck in the water. They took him home and bundled him up with rugs and hot water bottles, and that was that, or was it?

Next day Big John searched everywhere for Little John. At last he found him—in bed with the little refugee boy with the name so long. But alas, Little John who had got in to comfort the little boy had now

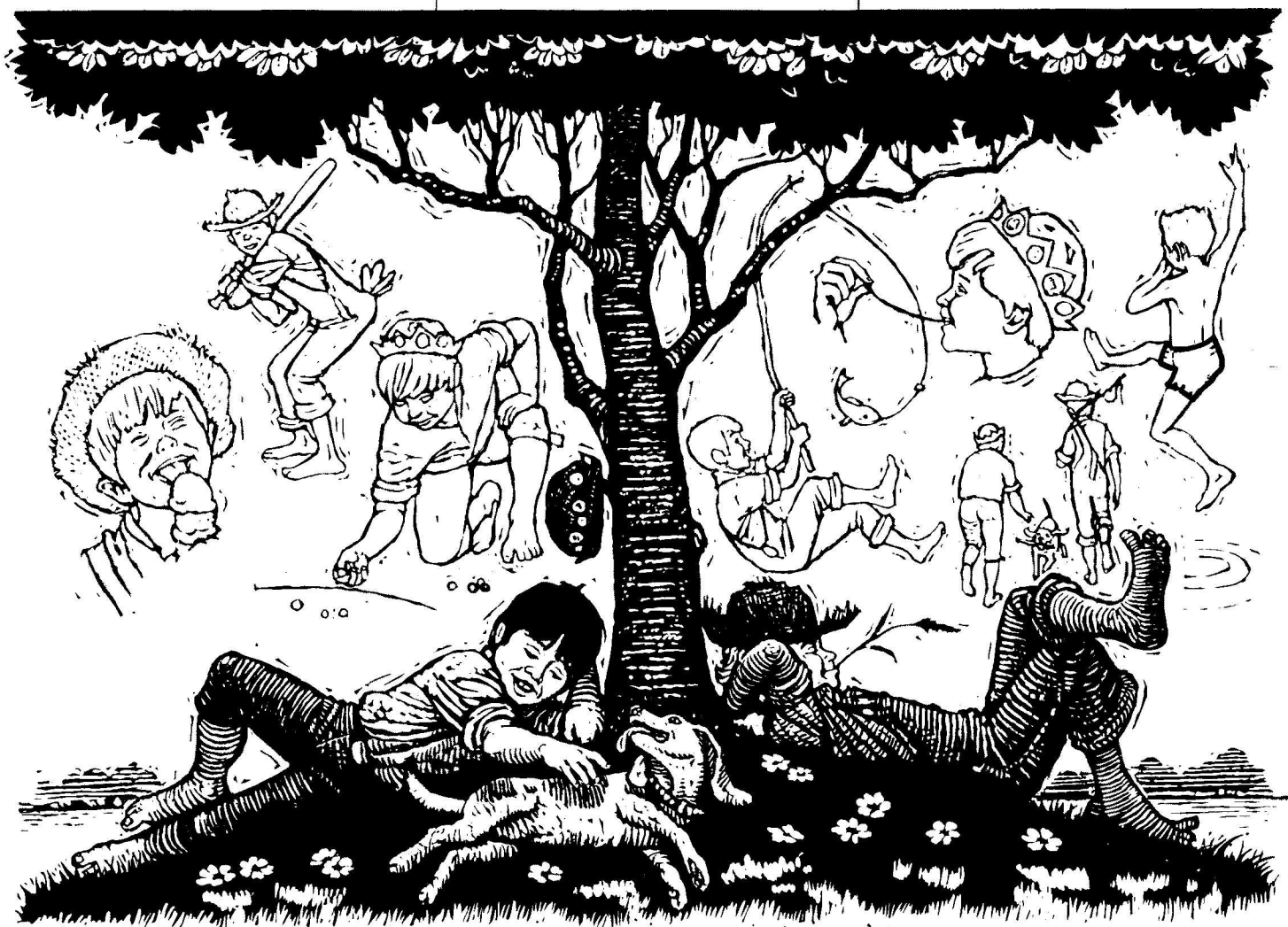
caught a bad cold from him, and it was a cold that had ripened into pneumonia, and sadly and tragically, but we must tell you the whole truth, Little John died.

Not long after that, when people went by the home of Big John, to their surprise they noticed with him a little boy who was doing exactly what Big John did, was dressed like him, and was very obedient and loving to him. And on the Sabbath day when they went to church, there beside Big John was this little boy and his feet were going around the small set of pedals on the smaller bicycle. They say to themselves—all who see—"But Little John is dead." But you know who it is. The little refugee boy, when he found out that he had caused the death of Little John, decided to take his place as best he could. And boys and girls, if you will think about that, and think of

what our sins did to God's son, you will know the way you and I ought to behave from day to day.



Desmond Ford







# RECEIVED YE THE SPIRIT?

BY RON ALLEN

Galatians 3 the Apostle sets forward two possible ways, a person might obtain the Holy Spirit. They are the way of **Law**, and the way of **Faith**. Paul saw a dreadful chasm between mans sinfulness and God's righteousness. For man to become a temple of the Holy Spirit, this chasm would have to be bridged.

In verse 10 Paul pictures those who are seeking to span the chasm by works of **Law**. What could these works of **Law** be? The same verse shows that the requirement of God's law is absolute. So that one trying to achieve the Holy Spirit by keeping it must needs be mighty particular about all his behaviour. His vigilance over himself must not lapse for an instant because his life depends upon it. Such a person is under a curse for it

is self evident that he is attempting the impossible.

In contrast to this cursed way there is the way of **Faith**. The way of **Faith** is the way of Christ. Jesus is made a curse for us and removes the curse from us. The way of **faith** applies the law's exacting demand to Christ. The claim of God is repositioned away from the sinner, at the cross.

***One trying to achieve the Holy Spirit by keeping God's Law must needs be mighty particular about all his behaviour. His vigilance over himself must not lapse for an instant because his***

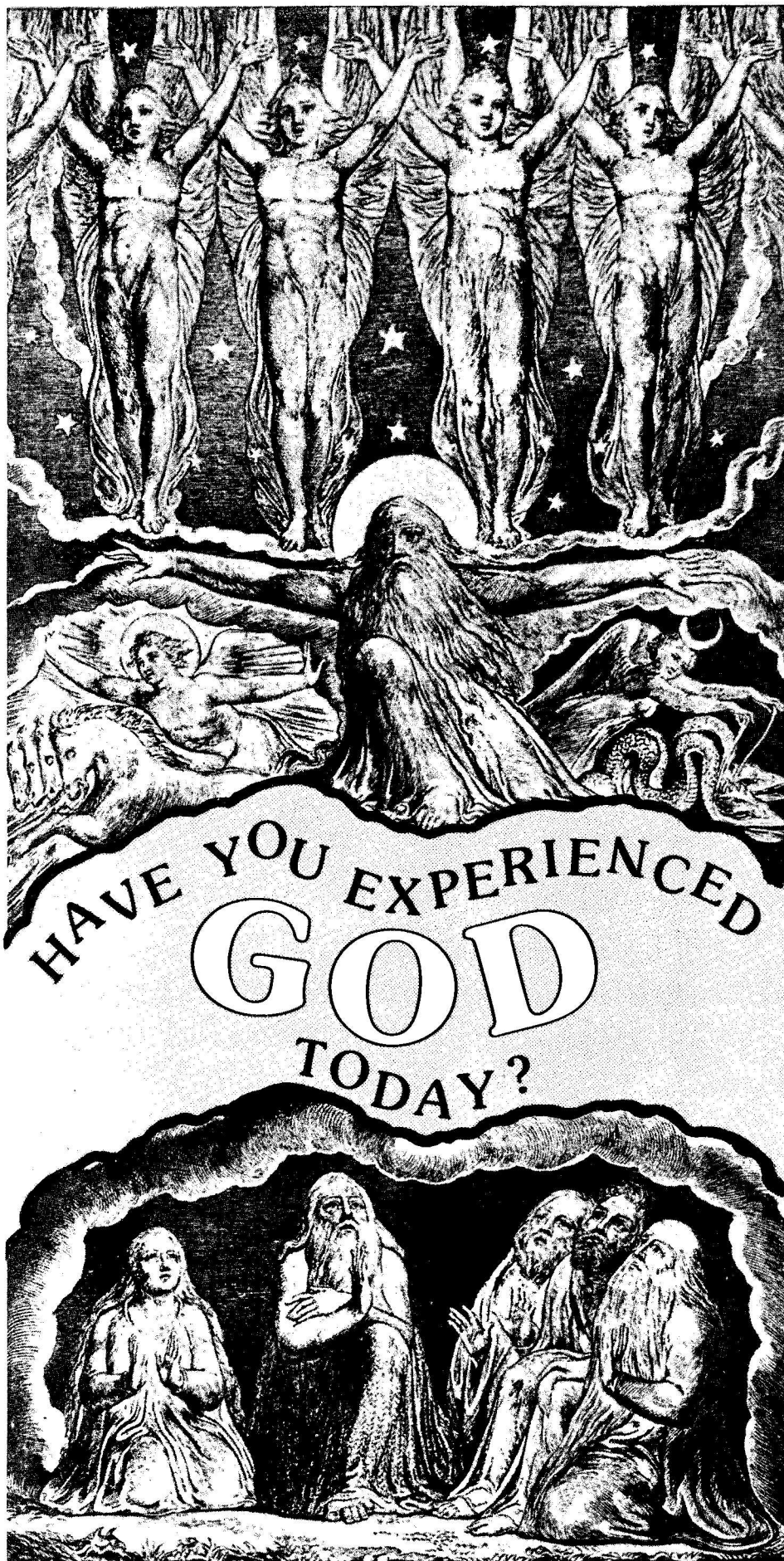
***life depends upon it.***

So then, the way of the **Law** is the way of the sinner's moral effort, leading (hopefully) to the Holy Spirit. But the way of **faith** is the way of the Spirit to the sinner through Christ. "...in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

Galatians 3:14

The Galatian heretics were insisting on an obedience subsequent to faith and in addition to it as a condition for receiving the Holy Spirit. Paul's thinking is thoroughly different. There is no law that can effectively curb sin. For him, Laws never stop sin – they start it! If men are to be freed from sin they must somehow be freed from Law.

CONTINUED ON P. 16



I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Eph 1:17-19)

This passage from Ephesians is a prayer. Paul was not only a great theologian but a great man of prayer. He is praying that the Christians of Asia Minor might experience the fullness of God in a deeper way. He wants them to mature in their faith so that they may know God better. Now that they've accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord, he prays that they won't stop there! He wants God to continually reveal himself to them, to enlighten them as to the privileges and responsibilities of their faith.

Here we see the ongoing nature of the Christian life. Faith in Christ is not a static thing that we do once and then coast the rest of the way. The Christian life is a life of ongoing development in our knowledge and understanding of God and of what it means to be a Christian. No Christian should ever be bored! There is too much growing to do. Thus Paul is praying that these Christians will *experience* God in a deeper way.

### Rational Religion

Have you experienced God lately? Sometimes we get very rational with our religion. We "discuss" theology as if it's something that comes to us on a computer printout. We are in danger of becoming theological eggheads, able to mouth all the stock theological phrases (e.g., justification, imputed, imparted, eschatological, alien righteousness, etc.) but unable to translate our head knowledge into a heart-felt experience. In our quest for eternal "truths" we can easily lose our spirituality.

by Brad McIntyre

And don't you long for a deeper spiritual life? Don't you long to experience God *for yourself* and know you've encountered the Divine? Aren't you tired of getting all your theological information secondhand from others who are trained in "God-talk"? Don't you wish at times you were more excited about Jesus, more happy about your faith, more enthusiastic about being a part of God's family?

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***Faith in Christ is not a static thing that we do once and then coast the rest of the way.***

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Even though some of us have been cautioned against trusting in our religious experience, experience is the stuff of theology. Theology is nothing more than rational reflection on religious experience. D. Elton Trueblood once wrote, "Religion is like falling in love; theology is like a treatise on courtship." This is true. Falling in love and writing a research paper on love are two very different things! And experiencing God firsthand and talking theology are two very different things also.

#### **How to Experience God**

How then can we experience God in a deeper way? First, we must understand that *we cannot force an encounter with God, but we can make ourselves available to God should he reveal himself.* The spiritual life is a life that is available to God. Even though God's self-disclosure cannot be forced or manipulated by human efforts, we still play a part in making ourselves available to God and open and alert to his presence at all times.

How available are *you* to God? Does God know how to get ahold of you in case of an emergency? If you haven't experienced God lately, perhaps it's because you're not available to him. Perhaps your agenda is too full.

How do we make ourselves available to God? First, *prayer*. Prayer is an attitude of constant openness to

God in which we make our inner selves available to him. Prayer is a two-way conversation with God: talking and listening. Too often if we do pray, it's on the run, and we don't sit still long enough to listen for God's voice. Certainly we can and should pray at all times in all situations. It should become as natural for us to pray as it is to breathe. But don't overlook the power of *private* prayer during moments of solitude—moments when you come apart for quiet meditation.

"Well," you say, "who's got time for solitude? I'm a busy mother with three kids . . ." Part of living is learning to schedule our time. No one is going to take us by the hand and lead us like children in order to get our priorities straight. Our schedules will never change until we take responsibility for changing them. If we were dying of lack of oxygen, we would do something *fast* to change the situation, no matter what our schedule looked like! In the same way, if we are *serious* about experiencing God, and if we are tired of a ho-hum Christian existence, we will do something to change the situation.

"I don't have time to pray," is a lame excuse. The truth of the matter is that we don't *take* time to pray. As a writer, I soon discovered there is never time to write; you must *steal* time to write. And so I write some days at 5:00 a.m., sometimes during my lunch hour, and sometimes at 11:00 p.m. The same is true for prayer and solitude. Time with God is not offered to any of us as a gift. We have to steal it from the other demands of life.

#### **The Bible, Worship and People**

Secondly, we can experience God through *Bible study*. I say "*we can* . . ." Sometimes we may not. You see, the Bible has no power apart from the Spirit. And even with the Spirit, the Bible still won't speak to us unless we make ourselves available to its message with humility. We need to

approach the Scriptures not like some historian of ancient literature or some professional philologist interested only in word origins. We must approach the Bible as if it contains the Word of God for our lives—because it does! The stories of the Bible are never meant to convey to us mere information. They contain, instead, a *message* about life and death, a *message* that is crucial to our well-being.

There's a *surplus of meaning* in the Bible, and we can go back to it again and again without exhausting its reservoirs of meaning. This is why we keep studying Scripture and continually interpreting it and applying it to our lives—because of its excess of meaning. We don't worship the Bible or take everything in it literally. But we do make ourselves available to God by interacting with the inspired messages of Scripture and letting them impact us, not just once, but over and over again.

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***How available are you to God? Does God know how to get ahold of you in case of an emergency? If you haven't experienced God lately, perhaps it's because you're not available to him. Perhaps your agenda is too full.***

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Thirdly, we experience God through *worship*—through songs and hymns, prayers and sharing, preaching and the sacraments. I hope we worship each week with other Christians in order to celebrate the grace of God and to deepen our experience of God's fullness. Worship happens whenever we turn our faces toward God and shout, "Hallelujah!" Worship is our communal "Hallelujah!" to God. And only a worshipping Christian will remain a strong and growing Christian. If you want a deeper experience of God, make yourself available to God during public worship and participate in the celebration with God's people!

Finally, we can experience God



through *people*. God speaks to us through other human beings. His self-revelation is usually incarnate: it takes the form of flesh and blood. *You* can teach me something about God that I could never learn on my own, no matter how many books I read.

***Time with God is not offered to any of us as a gift. We have to steal it from the other demands of life.***

There's only one you, and in you I see an aspect of God that I can't find anywhere else. In encountering your gifts and limitations, I am reminded of my own gifts and limitations and of how God wants to use us to complement one another. This is why fellowship is so important in the Christian life. Despite our need for private communion with God, Christianity is not a solitary religion. It is a communal affair. So let's get together and learn of God through each other!

Have you experienced God lately? Make yourself available to God through prayer, Bible study, worship and fellowship with others. These are at least four avenues for experiencing the fullness of God on a deeper level. No doubt there are others, but these are the basics of the Christian life which, if cultivated, will help us "to know him better."



Brad McIntyre

## Books in Review

Reviewed by Noel Mason

### Running Without Fear

*Running Without Fear*, Kenneth Cooper, Bantam Books, New York, 1985, 256 pages.

Since the death of running guru, Jim Fixx, the hazards of jogging have been furiously debated. Dr. Cooper, of aerobics fame, joins the debate with his highly informative book, *Running Without Fear*. Obviously, I do not have adequate space to critique or review the book in these columns. Nor for that matter, am I qualified in Dr. Cooper's area of specialty. However, I do have space to excite the reader's interest in the burden of Dr. Cooper's latest work.

Dr. Cooper's objective is to clear away the confusion and ignorance that has come with the death of Jim Fixx. "Exercise," says Cooper, "is absolutely essential to good health. It's the cornerstone for any complete effort to reduce the risk of heart attack and sudden death. It's also a major key to an energetic, long life" (p. 1). While the author appreciates the value of regular exercise, he is not unaware of the fact that some exercise enthusiasts have taken extreme positions. "There are those," writes Cooper, "who believe that a regimen of long-distance running, swimming or cycling will solve all ills and wipe out any possibility of heart disease. They have become victims of a syndrome that raises

exercise to an undeserved level of superpanacea" (p. 2).

In Chapter 1, "The Jim Fixx Syndrome," Cooper destroys four popular myths about aerobic exercise. The myths are as follows: (i) I couldn't have heart disease and run the way I run without symptoms. (ii) People who run marathons don't die of heart attacks. (iii) Stress tests are worthless because they produce too many false readings. (False positives and negatives). (iv) If you are a highly conditioned, long-distance runner, you can forget your heredity. Readers will find Cooper's response to these myths interesting and satisfying.

In Chapter 2, Cooper asks the question: Why did Jim Fixx die? He notes that Jim's lifestyle before he embarked on a running regimen was not conducive to longevity of life. Excessive stress, heavy smoking, sedentary living and obesity—when combined with heredity—were factors leading to Jim's untimely death. Cooper also notes that Jim Fixx never underwent regular, comprehensive medical tests.

There are other interesting chapters like "Which Aerobic Exercise Is Right for You?" and "Can You Really Prolong Your Life?"

As all Christians want to be good stewards of their bodies, Cooper's book is well worth reading and certainly worth its modest price (\$3.95).

### Just a thought. . .

"Without the cross, there can be no resurrection. Anyone who thinks that out of the sheer bliss of the resurrection one can just jump over the cross, is a victim of the blindness to reality that affects all enthusiasts or neoenthusiasts of world history. For Christians, resurrection faith is not to be had by passing over suffering, concrete conditions, opposition and antagonism, but only by going through all this. Cross and resurrection are thus in a continual mutual relationship. The cross is "surmountable" only in the light of the resurrection, but the resurrection can be lived only in the shadows of the cross. The resurrection faith thus points back constantly to him who was not spared the long road by way of cross, death and tomb."

Küng, *Eternal Life*, p. 114-15

## Questions and Answers

**Q.** In one of your tapes you state that the word "sinners" (Mk 2:13-17) is not a reference to the common people, i.e., people designated as sinners by the Pharisees but really wicked people. But what's your point, we are all sinners aren't we?

**A.** Yes, we are all sinners. To understand my point you need to appreciate that many Christian scholars took the Greek word for "sinners" (*hamartoloi*) in Mark 2:16, Matthew 9:9-13, etc., as a reference to those who the *Pharisees* felt were sinners, simply because they did not practice certain purity laws, etc. But recent studies have demonstrated that such an interpretation of "sinners" is wrong. Rather, the word refers to those who were willfully wicked, deliberate lawbreakers who stood outside the covenant. Jesus was not just hobnobbing with "the down-and-out." He was associating with the rotters, those who willfully violated the law of God. In fact, he offered them the kingdom.

The point is worth making, for it draws our attention not only to Jesus' radical conception of grace but also his way of evangelizing wicked people. Jesus didn't stand aloof demanding repentance first and communion second. Rather he wanted precisely the reverse—communion first, conversion second. It was this familiarity with the wicked people that exacerbated some of the Pharisees. If you will pardon my impiety, I think that many fundamentalists and evangelical communities of today would find Jesus just as offensive.

**Q.** What does the concept "prevenient grace" mean?

**A.** It refers to the belief that the grace of God precedes the free choice of the human will (Rom 8:29ff).

**Q.** Can you explain the words *eisegesis* and *exegesis*?

**A.** *Eisegesis* refers to the practice of reading one's own interpretation into a text. *Exegesis* is the opposite of *eisegesis*. It means getting the meaning of a text out of the text itself.

**Q.** What do you think of the New King James Version (1979)?

**A.** Every translation has some value. The New King James version no doubt is easier to read than the old, but it ignores all the text-critical conclusions of the last 300 years. It is therefore not suitable for serious, in-depth Bible study.

**Q.** Why don't you speak out more against the evils of our society?

**A.** The best way of counteracting evil is to love and promote the good. I certainly wouldn't enjoy the image of someone who was well known for what he hated but unknown for what he loved. One writer put it this way: "If you hate evil more than you love good, then you end up being a damn good hater.... Hate evil, yes, but we want to do it out of such love

for the good that the evil becomes intolerable" (W. Sloane Coffin, *Peace in Search of Makers*). In recent times we have spoken out against some of the major evils, e.g., the arms race. Unfortunately, "speaking out" doesn't always change things.

**Q.** How do you understand texts such as 1 Timothy 2:11-16, 2 Timothy 3:6-7, which seem to *speak so harshly* against women?

**A.** Every bit of biblical literature has its own historical life setting and cannot be safely interpreted without some knowledge of that life setting. The biblical writers were not immune to some of the peculiarities of their own culture. The general attitudes that women are intended only for the domestic life, that their mental ability is inferior to that of men, and that domestic harmony can be had only through a clear authority structure *dominated* by men are, in my opinion, part of the cultural assumptions of biblical times. However, there are examples of women taking leading roles, etc. in the Bible, and so we must not assume that the social customs of Bible times are uniform (Miriam, Ex 15:20-21; Deborah, Jdg. 4-5; Esther, etc.)

Those who use passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-16 to define a role for women today are not always consistent. For example, why don't they take 1 Peter 2:18 just as seriously? The history of biblical interpretation shows that we can all be guilty of selective "proof texting."

—Noel Mason



Such a freedom as this has been granted us in the gift of God's Son. According to the first 4 verses of Romans 8, what was unachievable by the way of the Law, has been brought to pass through Jesus by the "Law of the Spirit." Far from the Law procuring the Spirit the Spirit lays hold of the sinner and sets him free from the curse imposed by the law. Voices are often heard, in Christian circles, calling for a "deeper experience of the Spirit". The faithful are exhorted so to live, that they will be given "more of the Spirit". Someone testifies that he/she received a burst of new power when the Holy Spirit "Filled" their life. Such testimonies are often accompanied by entreaties for a "more full surrender," "a deeper denial of self", "a greater commitment". Sayings like these risk the communication of the Galatian heresy, which was, that whereas the

initial Gift of God could be obtained by faith, subsequent infillings were to be had by actions of the soul. More yieldings and inner piety. As such these can be regarded as nothing but works of Law by which the person is placed again beneath the crushing curse. Christ was made a curse for us and His obedience to God is the fulfilled condition for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Both Christ and the Spirit of Christ are given to them that believe.

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***The obedience of Christ is the fulfilled condition for the reception of the Holy Spirit.***

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The God-ordained means for the giving of the Holy Spirit to individuals is the preaching of the Gospel.

Galatians 3:1-2. The Good News that Christ has, for us, met the demand of God and cleared the way for the Spirit to live in us. This is the Gospel that causes conversion and begins Christian life. Nothing that happens after conversion can call forth another Gospel. The gift of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, belongs together with the gift of forgiveness. Acts 2:38, 5:31-32. There are no privileges in the Christian life which can outstrip those that accompany conversion. Growth in grace is never growth beyond these but growth in them.

***"I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the Law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"***  
***Galatians 3:2-3***

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